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Owl Pellet Dissection Worksheet

**Owl Pellets**

Owl pellets are masses of bone, teeth, hair, feathers and exoskeletons of various animals preyed upon by raptors, or birds of prey. Pellets are produced and regurgitated not only by owls, but by hawks, eagles and other raptors that swallow their prey whole of in small pieces. Owls feed feed early in the evening and regurgitate a single pellet approximately 20 hours after eating. Unlike snakes, the protein enzymes and strong acids, which occur in the digestive tract of raptors, do not digest the entire meal. The relatively weak stomach muscles of the bird form the undigested fur, bones, feather etc. into wet slimy pellets. In this process even the most fragile bones are usually preserved unbroken.

Directions:

1. Observe your owl pellet. Are there signs of fur or feathers on the outside of the pellet? Record your observations in the external observation section below.
2. Begin by pulling apart your owl pellet carefully. You may use the toothpick provided to help you with this task.
3. Separate all bones, fur, and feathers.
4. When your pellet is fully dissected, use the bone chart to begin identifying the different bones found in your pellet. Record your findings in the chart below.
5. Identify the organisms found in your pellet. Record types and numbers of organisms below.
6. When you have identified all of your remains, you may try to use the bone chart to put the organism back together!
7. When you have finished, clean up your area thoroughly and finish this worksheet.

Owl Pellet external observations: Draw your pellet. What can you see on the outside of this pellet?

Bones found

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Bone** | **Type** | **Number** |
| Skull |  |  |
| Jaw |  |  |
| Scapula |  |  |
| Forelimb |  |  |
| Hindlimb |  |  |
| Pelvic Bone |  |  |
| Rib |  |  |
| Vertebrae |  |  |

What organisms did you find in your owl pellet? How many of each organism? What is the total number of organisms?

What can owl pellets tell us about the ecosystem where the owl lives?

What would happen if the most abundant organism in your owl pellet was taken out of the food chain?

Define producers, consumers, and decomposers:

Draw a food web containing at least 6 organisms with owls as the top consumer. Use arrows to depict flow of energy. Be sure to include and label producers, consumers, and decomposers.

From your drawing above, pick out and draw one food chain containing at least 4 organisms with the owl at the top of the chain. Label producer, consumers, and decomposers (if used in chain). Use arrows to depict the flow of energy.